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THE
Saturday Magazine.

Nº 493.

MARCH



7TH, 1840.

{ PRICE
ONE PENNY.

OLD ENGLISH MANSIONS.



THE HALL, AT OCKWELLS, IN BERKSHIRE.

OCKWELLS, IN BERKSHIRE.

Is there anything which conveys us back, in imagination, more completely to the olden times, than the sight of one of our old baronial residences? We fancy we see the squire, the "old English gentleman," surrounded by his family and dependants;—the hall, hung about with trophies of the chase;—the open fire-places, with the wood fires;—the old, lumbering, but roomy, family coach;—and then, on Sunday, the squire, a true Sir Roger de Coverley, going to church in the midst of his humbler neighbours, who regard him as a protector, as a sort of second father. The old squire, too, was member for the county, and we see him undertake the momentous enterprise of a journey to London, to attend his parliamentary duties. All this, and much more, the mind can picture, when an old family mansion is before us. Perhaps no publication ever contributed more to this effect than a splendid work recently produced by Mr. Nash, under the title of *The Mansions of England in the Olden Time**. This is not a mere architectural work: the old apartments are peopled with inmates of bygone ages, the object being, to use the author's remark, "to represent the stately homes of England, glowing with the genial warmth of their firesides, and enlivened with the presence of their inmates and guests, enjoying the recreations and pastimes, or celebrating the festivals, of our ancestors."

It is from one of this series of plates that our frontispiece is, by permission of the publisher, taken. It represents *Ockwells*, an ancient mansion, situated about a mile westward of the village of Bray, in Berkshire. The village of Bray has acquired a sort of notoriety, to which its importance would not have entitled it. The living is a vicarage in the diocese of Salisbury, but in the patronage of the Bishop of Oxford. This living was once held by a "Vicar of Bray," who has been handed down to posterity for having frequently changed his religion. As different versions of the circumstances have been given, we will quote from FULLER'S *Worthies*, where, we believe the account was first given:—

But first we will despatch that sole proverb of the county of Berkshire, viz., *The Vicar of Bray will be Vicar of Bray still*. Bray, a village well known in this county, so called from the BISHOPS, a kind of ancient Britons inhabiting thereabouts. The vivacious vicar hereof, living under King Henry the Eighth, King Edward the Sixth, Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth, was first a Papist, then a Protestant, then a Papist, then a Protestant again. He had seen some martyrs burnt (two miles off) at Windsor, and found this fire too hot for his tender temper. This vicar being taxed by one for being a turncoat, and an unconstant changeling,—"Not so," said he, "for I alwaies kept my principle, which is this, to live and die the vicar of Bray." So many now adays, who though they cannot turn the wind, will turn their mills, and set them so, that where-soever it bloweth, their grist shall certainly be grinded.

But to return from Bray to the old mansion in its neighbourhood. *Ockwells* used formerly to be called *Ockholt*. The manor called by this name is much more ancient than the manor-house at present existing. We are told that in the year 1267, Richard de Norreys, cook to Eleanor, queen of Henry the Third, had a grant of *Ockholt* from that monarch, subject to a fee-farm rent of forty shillings: the grant states it to have been an encroachment from the forest. The next circumstance we hear respecting the manor is, that John Norreys, Esq., most likely a descendant from the Richard just named, made a will, in 1465, in which he stated that *Ockholt*, or *Ockwells House*, was built, but not quite completed by him up to the

year when the will was made. This John Norreys was first Usher of the Chamber, next Esquire of the Body, and afterwards Master of the Wardrobe to King Henry the Sixth; also Esquire of the Body to King Edward the Fourth. In his will he left a certain sum "to the full building and making uppe of the chapell, with the chamber adjoyning, within my mannor of *Ockholt*, in the parish of Bray, not yet finished." This is the manor-house now existing.

The next mention we find relating to the manor is, that Sir William Norreys, who was commander in the king's army at the battle of Stoke, died seized of this estate in 1507. From the family of the Norreys, it appears to have passed into the hands of the Fettiplaces. After this, it was possessed by the family of Day, one member of which, Sir Thomas Day, bore the not very enviable reputation of being the keenest hunter, and the hardest drinker in the county of Berks. The manner in which he acquired his knighthood was curious. Although a tolerably rich man, he was plain Thomas Day, a farmer. He used frequently to join in the royal hunts, and more than once spurred on and opened gates or tore up a hedge, for Queen Anne to pass. This attracted Her Majesty's attention: she thanked him, and asked him his name. He replied, "Thomas Day, happy to serve your Majesty." The Queen said, "Well, sir, I will make you a knight in token of my gratitude." She called for a sword, which was given to her: Mr. Day then knelt on one knee, and the Queen said, "Rise up, Sir Thomas." A writer in an old volume of *The Gentleman's Magazine* says:—"My father has often, when I was young, riding out with him, shown me the gate at which Sir Thomas Day was knighted."

The manor of *Ockwells* then passed into the family of Finch, of Hertfordshire; and from this family it passed to Penyston Powney, Esq. M.P. for Berkshire. About sixty years ago a considerable portion of the manor-house was burnt down, by a beggar shaking out the ashes of his pipe amongst the straw of the farm-yard. The portion now existing is a farm-house, in the possession of John Shackell, Esq.

Such is a brief notice of the history of this remarkable old building. The house itself presents a very curious specimen of the mansion-houses of the gentry of the age in which it was erected: indeed it is considered as the most perfect of the few remaining; the numerous gables which present themselves are particularly beautiful. The hall—the most considerable room in the building—has lost somewhat of its original effect by having the carved roof concealed by a flat ceiling; but the panneling of the walls is still preserved. The most striking part of this hall is the large window, of six bays filled with stained glass, and which appears to be nearly in as complete a state as when the house was first erected. These windows are chiefly occupied with coats of arms, having crests and lambrequins, one in each window, on a ground of diagonal stripes, containing flowers and mottoes in text hand, placed alternately. Among the arms are those of King Henry the Sixth, with the antelopes, his supporters; and of his queen, Margaret of Anjou, with her supporters, the antelope and eagle; also the arms of Norreys, with beavers for supporters; the Abbey of Westminster; Beaufort, Duke of Somerset; Edmund, last Earl of March; Henry, Duke of Warwick; De la Pole, Duke of Suffolk; Sir William Beauchamp, Lord St. Amand; Sir William Lacon of Bray, Chief Justice of the King's Bench; the Lord Wenlock; Sir Richard Nanfan, Captain of Calais; Sir John Pury, Knight, of Chamberhouse Castle, in the parish of Thatcham; and of one or two other distinguished personages.

* *The Mansions of England in the Olden Time*. By JOSEPH NASH, A.D. 1839. Published by T. M. M'Lean, Haymarket, London.

Among the coats of arms here mentioned, the most curious are those of King Henry the Sixth, Queen Margaret, and the house of Norreys. In the window, or compartment containing the first, there is the Imperial crown with the arms of England beneath; and at stated distances down the window are repetitions of the motto

Dieu et mon Droit

running obliquely downwards from left to right. In another compartment, devoted to Queen Margaret of Anjou, there is the crown of the Queen Consort, with the arms beneath, and, running from left to right at stated distances, as in the last instance are repetitions of the Queen's motto

Humble et Loiall.

In the compartment of the Norreys family, there are the family arms, and numerous repetitions of the family motto

Heftighfully Serbe

with the name *Norrys* at the left hand bottom corner.

Mr. Nash has represented this old house in three different points of view. He has given an exterior view of the front, where, in order to bring back recollection of olden times, he has represented the bridal procession of a country gentleman in the time of Elizabeth, with preparations for the entertainment of the retainers. In another plate, the interior of the hall is given, with the style of hospitality shown to courtly guests: the squire and his lady are seated after dinner, at the "orsille," or high table, on the "dais," a part elevated a little above the floor, in the bay; the visitors of inferior rank being placed at the long table: at such an hour as this the attendance of a harper was not unusual. In a third plate, Mr. Nash has represented the porch and corridor, which are very characteristic from their extreme simplicity and quaintness. "Altogether," says Mr. Nash, "this house is well deserving the attention of the architect as well as the antiquary; for it offers many features that might be adapted to the present style of building country residences of moderate dimensions."

ENGLAND! with all thy faults I love thee still,
My country! and while yet a nook is left,
Where English minds and manners may be found,
Shall be constrained to love thee. Though thy clime
Be fickle, and thy year most part deformed
With dripping rains, or withered by a frost,
I would not yet exchange thy sullen skies,
And fields without a flower, for warmer France
With all her vines; nor for Ausonia's groves
Or golden fruitage, and her myrtle bowers.
To shake thy senate, and from heights sublime
Of patriot eloquence to flash down fire
Upon thy foes, was never meant my task;
But I can feel thy fortunes, and partake
Thy joys and sorrows, with as true a heart,
As any thunderer there.—COWPER.

No man was ever so completely skilled in the conduct of life as not to receive new information from age and experience; inasmuch that we find ourselves really ignorant of what we thought we understood, and see cause to reject what we fancied our truest interest.

A PERSON accustomed to a life of activity longs for ease and retirement, and when he has accomplished his purpose, finds himself wretched. The pleasure of relaxation, indeed, is known to those only who have regular and interesting employment. Continued relaxation soon becomes a weariness: and, on this ground, we may safely assert, that the greatest degree of real enjoyment belongs, not to the luxurious man of wealth, or the listless votary of fashion, but to the middle classes of society, who, along with the comforts of life, have constant and important occupation.—ABERCROMBIE.

ON BANDANA HANDKERCHIEFS.

A RIVALRY of a remarkable kind has arisen within the last fifty years, in the production of certain woven fabrics. The Hindoos are celebrated above the natives of almost every other country, for the delicacy of their sense of touch, and the general suppleness of their limbs. This delicacy and suppleness have shown their influence in the beautiful muslins and similar articles, which for ages they have been able to produce. The spinning and weaving carried on in India are effected in the rudest possible manner, so far as regards the machines and implements employed; and yet the productions have excelled everything which the more cultivated natives of Europe could produce, principally on account of the manual dexterity, neatness, and quickness, possessed by the Hindoos.

But when the great improvements in our machinery increased the power of the manufacturer, the peculiarities of Indian manufacture became fully equalled by home production. One instance of this was in muslins, a very fine sort of calico or cotton. Formerly nothing could be procured in England equal in fineness and beauty to the muslins produced in India. This is no longer the case: our manufacturers can now produce muslins fully equal in every respect to the best productions of the Hindoo loom. The cost and celerity of production we do not here allude to: those are undisputed points: we speak of the actual quality of the material.

Another instance bearing on the same question is the production of *Bandana Handkerchiefs*, a subject that will afford us interesting materials for the present paper. The term *Bandana* is of Indian origin, and was applied to a peculiar kind of pocket handkerchiefs, both of silk and of cotton, made in India. These handkerchiefs were much sought after throughout Europe,—probably from the circumstance that nothing equal to them could be produced in Europe. The ground of these handkerchiefs was usually of red, blue, or purple; and the pattern almost always consisted of spots, either white or yellow. The colour with which the handkerchiefs were dyed, was uncommonly permanent and enduring.

The demand for these handkerchiefs being very general, British manufacturers were induced to try how far they could produce successful imitations of them in cotton, which might be sold at a low price. The first attempts to produce this were very imperfect, being the common mode of *printing* calicoes, which we may here briefly explain. Suppose the pattern to be produced were a blue ground, with white spots arranged in a determinate pattern. A piece of white calico or cotton was taken, and spread out on a table or bench properly arranged. A wood block was carved or cut in such a way, that raised or uncut parts were left for all that portion of the pattern which was to consist of the blue ground, while all the parts which were correspondent to the white spots were cut away. The block was then laid down on a board wet with blue dye,—either of indigo or some other blue-producing colour,—by which a layer of blue dye or ink was taken up on the raised parts of the carved block. This was then stamped down on the cloth, thereby leaving a blue ground on the cloth, relieved by white spots where no dye had touched the block. The whole process is indeed very similar to those of wood-cut engraving and printing.

There are many reasons why such a plan is wholly inadequate to the production of a good dye; and even with the aid of many improvements that have since taken place, both in dyeing and in calico printing, a good imitation of *Bandana handkerchiefs*

could not possibly be produced by such means. The colours, particularly the red, were found to be far from durable as thus produced.

A very important discovery relative to the nature and properties of *Chlorine*, led the way to a different mode of attaining the desired end,—a mode as beautiful in a scientific point of view as it is economical when considered commercially. The parties who contributed more or less to those improvements which led to the production of beautiful imitation Bandanas were many; but the firm of Monteith and Co. at Glasgow are most eminently connected with the subject. We shall now, therefore, describe the machinery and the processes by which these manufacturers produce handkerchiefs, of which the colours are as glowing and durable, and the white spots as pure and finely outlined, as any of the productions of the East.

The first operation is to dye the piece of cotton of the required colour, and in the best manner which the art of dyeing can present.

The most difficult colour to impart is Turkey or Adrianople red, a colour which for a long period could not be equalled by either British or French dyers. The oriental method of producing the Turkey red gradually found its way to Greece, and from thence to France. M. Papillon then brought over the method to Glasgow, where, in course of time, it became publicly known, and the house of Monteith and Co. soon became celebrated for the beauty of the Turkey reds produced there. The mode of dyeing is far too intricate for us to detail here, but we will merely mention that the dye is produced chiefly by the use of *madder*.

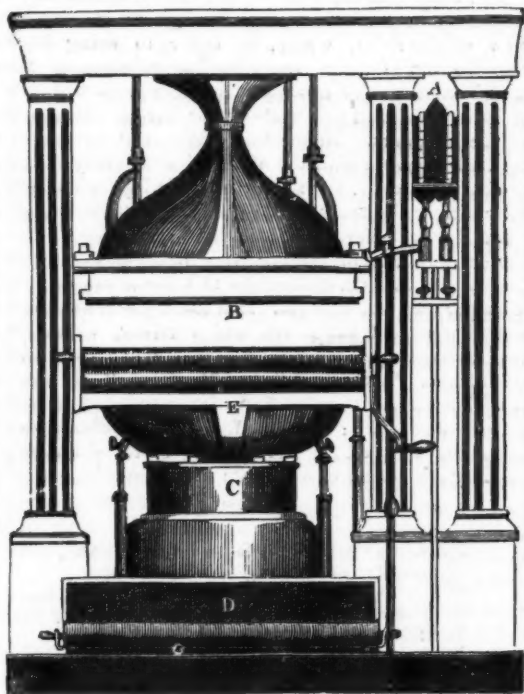
Now the great principle by which the Bandanas are produced from the piece of red or blue cotton, is by *removing* the colour from certain round or square spots disposed in a pattern over the surface of the cotton. This we are enabled to do by the peculiar property, possessed by *chlorine*, of removing colour of almost every kind, and under almost any circumstances. If a solution of chloride of lime (which derives its peculiar bleaching value from the chlorine contained in it) be dropped on the dyed cotton, the colour would be removed from that spot. The question is, therefore, how can the chlorine be so applied as to remove the colour from a regular series of spots, all symmetrical in shape and well ordered? This is effected by shielding the whole surface of the cloth with a piece of sheet lead through which are cut a series of holes into which the chlorine solution can flow. These plates are prepared by laying a very smooth piece of sheet lead on a thicker piece of the same metal: a piece of drawing paper is laid on the lead: the desired pattern is drawn on the paper; and a man cuts out both paper and lead by making perpendicular cuts quite through both of them into the lower sheet of lead. Perforations are made through the lower piece of lead, corresponding to those in the thin one, so that if a piece of dyed cloth were placed between them and powerfully pressed, and a chlorine solution were poured on the upper plate, it would pass into the holes in the upper plate,—through the cloth,—and out by the holes in the lower plate.

Now the object to be attained here is, to prevent the cloth, whether of one or more thicknesses, from being touched by the solution in any part except where the designed spots are to be. This can only be attained by intense pressure; for we know how soon a liquid will spread sideways among the fibres of a piece of cloth. There are many ways of producing intense pressure; but the one that is found most available for this purpose is that of the hydrostatic press. As the principle of that beautiful machine

is described in a recent article*, we need not detail it here, but shall proceed to show how it is brought to bear on the manufacture with which we are at present concerned.

At Monteith's factory, the hydrostatic arrangement is contained in one room, called the machinery room, and the presses, with the handkerchiefs, &c., are in another, and there is a communication between the two. Fourteen thicknesses of cloth are operated on at once; and there are sixteen different presses arranged in a row, occupying a space one hundred feet in length, so that 224 pieces of cloth are being treated simultaneously. The hydrostatic arrangement consists of two cylinders, one eight inches in diameter, and the other one inch, to which are attached three little force pumps, worked by a steam engine. The difference in the diameters of the two cylinders produces the pressure, on the principles explained in the paper just quoted.

We must now illustrate these details by a cut, which represents one of the sixteen presses contained in the Bandana gallery.



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B and E are the upper and lower parts of the press, comprising the perforated plates through which the bleaching liquid is to pass. The size of these plates is about equal to that of a pocket handkerchief. Fourteen pieces of cloth are laid quite flat and parallel, one on another, and rolled on a beam at the back of the press. From this beam sufficient cloth is drawn out to cover the lower plate and receive the chlorine liquor, and after having thus been operated on, it is drawn between the rollers seen a little above and in front of the lower plate E, and from thence falls into a cistern of water D, at the lower part of the press. Supposing a layer of handkerchiefs to be placed on the lower plate E, that plate has to be lifted up, in order to meet the upper plate. This is effected by opening a communication between the 8-inch cylinder of the hydrostatic press and a cylinder, C, beneath the lower plate. As the 8-inch cylinder is loaded with a weight of five tons,

* See Saturday Magazine, Vol. XVI., p. 69.

the cylinder c is driven up by the same power. But when it is driven up so far that the handkerchiefs lying on it meet the upper plate, then an enormous pressure is brought into action, to press the handkerchiefs tightly together. This pressure is produced by shutting off the communication with the 8-inch cylinder, and opening that with the 1-inch cylinder. The 1-inch cylinder is also loaded with a weight of five tons, and as the cylinder c is about eight inches in diameter, it can be proved, according to the laws of hydrostatic pressure, that the lower plate becomes pressed against the upper one with a force of 5 tons $\times 8'' = 320$ tons = 716800 lbs. By this intense pressure the handkerchiefs are held so tightly together, that any fluid passing down to them through the perforations in the upper plate, cannot spread laterally.

All is now ready for the admission of the aqueous chlorine. This is prepared in an adjoining room, and admitted to a small leaden cistern, A, at the side of each press, which is provided with graduated tubes, by which the quantity admitted at one time can be regulated according to the number of spots in the pattern of the handkerchief. The liquid is allowed to flow through a pipe into the upper part of the press (which is fixed): it then flows through the perforations in the plate B, through the fourteen thicknesses of handkerchiefs, removing from them the Turkey red or other dye in its passage, and after passing through the perforations in E, finally leaves the press by pipes arranged for that purpose. The liquor is allowed to remain a few minutes to act on the cloth; after which it is drawn off, and clean water is allowed to pass through in a similar manner, to wash away the chlorine, otherwise on relaxing the pressure, the outline of the figure discharged would become ragged.

So admirable are the arrangements, that four men are sufficient to manage the whole sixteen presses, and keep them all working at once. They first go from press to press, admitting the water from the eight-inch cylinder, by which the lower plate is raised:—the layer of handkerchiefs in each press is arranged in its proper place:—the powerful pressure is then put in operation to them all:—the chlorine liquor is admitted:—the cleansing water is admitted:—the presses are again opened:—the layer of handkerchiefs is drawn between the rollers, and another layer brought between the plates; and so on, taking all the presses in succession. No time is lost by this method, since the chlorine requires to act for a few minutes on the handkerchiefs in each press. When fourteen pieces are entirely finished, they are carried away to the washing and bleaching departments, where the lustre of both the white and the colours is considerably heightened. By the excellent arrangement of the sixteen presses, 1600 pieces, consisting of 12 yards each, equal to 19,200 yards, are converted into Bandanas in the space of ten hours, by the assistance of four workmen.

The reader will then understand that it is by such a mode as this that are produced those red or blue handkerchiefs with white spots, in which the threads of the material are so thoroughly acted on, that both sides of cloth present almost precisely analogous appearances. The cloth is first dyed all over; and the colour is then driven out from those parts which are to form the spots of the pattern.

Each power that sovereign Nature bids enjoy,
Man may corrupt, but man can ne'er destroy.
Like mighty rivers, with resistless force
The passions rage, obstructed in their course;
Swell to new heights, forbidden paths explore,
And drown those virtues which they fed before.

BROWN.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MONTHS.

III. MARCH.

Sturdy March, with brows full sternly bent,
And armed strongly, rode upon a ram;
The same which over Hellespontus swam;
Yet in his hand a spade he also hent,
And in a bag all sorts of seeds ysame,
Which on the earth he strewed as he went.—SPENSER

THIS month was the first of the year among the ancients; and not without reason, for they had the sanction of a divine command in this respect. The period of the Vernal equinox was prescribed to the Israelites for the commencement of their sacred year, and all the great festivals ordained by their law were regulated by it. Their civil year began in September, and is still considered to begin at that time by the Jewish people. The English year began at one time in March; but, by an Act of Parliament, passed in 1752, it was determined that the year should henceforth commence on the 1st of January. The Spring or the Autumnal equinox appears the fit time for commencing the year, but it is difficult to assign any reason for the choice of January as the opening month.

The Romans named this, the third month of our year, in honour of Mars, the god of war; perhaps from the fierce and blustering winds generally prevalent at its commencement. These winds are often piercingly cold, coming in from the east for many days together; and frequent and loud are the complaints made against the severity of the weather during this month. But trying as the season may be to aged persons and invalids, it is essentially necessary in such a climate as ours, that after the snow, and rain, and thaws of February, the superabundant moisture of the earth should be dried up, and the soil prepared for ploughing, and sowing, and receiving, with due effect, the warm sunshine and Spring showers. So much, indeed, does the value of the future harvest depend on dry weather at this season of the year, that the proverb is not inappropriate which declares, "a bushel of March dust is worth a king's ransom." And as to the terrors of an east wind, which many persons in perfect health are fearful of exposing themselves to, we may borrow the remark, that "the oftener we meet it firmly, the less it will shake us, and the more smiles we shall have from the fair months that follow."

The Winter birds of passage now begin to leave our shores. These birds quit the North of Europe, when that region becomes "ice-bound, firm as a rock," and take refuge in our more temperate climate. The field-fare, red-wing, and woodcock are of this kind, the reason of whose arrival here is evident, but as to their departure, it is not so easily accounted for why they should prefer retiring to spend their Summer in Norway or Sweden to remaining with us. If they can find food here in the Winter, they certainly would not want for a full supply in Summer; and if they were impatient of warmth, they would not quit us at a time when it is much cooler here than they would find a Lapland Summer to be. If we are thus deprived of our Winter visitants, we are soon to be amply compensated by the arrival of others from the South, who shall "cheer the woods and valleys with their ceaseless songs," and gladden our hearts with the well-known melody of Spring. The industrious but thievish tribes of rooks now begin to repair their old nests, or to construct new ones. The rookery is a scene of bustle and contention; loud and angry cawings are heard on all sides, and it affords no small

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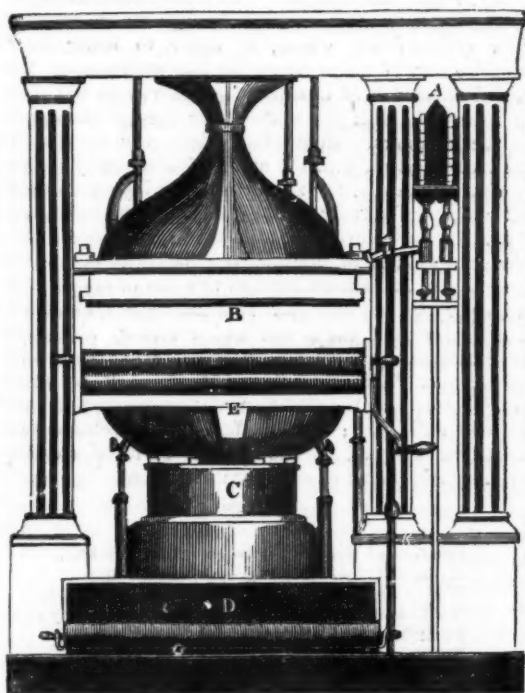
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* See *Saturday Magazine*, Vol. XVI., p. 69.

the cylinder c is driven up by the same power. But when it is driven up so far that the handkerchiefs lying on it meet the upper plate, then an enormous pressure is brought into action, to press the handkerchiefs tightly together. This pressure is produced by shutting off the communication with the 8-inch cylinder, and opening that with the 1-inch cylinder. The 1-inch cylinder is also loaded with a weight of five tons, and as the cylinder c is about eight inches in diameter, it can be proved, according to the laws of hydrostatic pressure, that the lower plate becomes pressed against the upper one with a force of 5 tons $\times 8^2 = 320$ tons = 716800 lbs. By this intense pressure the handkerchiefs are held so tightly together, that any fluid passing down to them through the perforations in the upper plate, cannot spread laterally.

All is now ready for the admission of the aqueous chlorine. This is prepared in an adjoining room, and admitted to a small leaden cistern, A, at the side of each press, which is provided with graduated tubes, by which the quantity admitted at one time can be regulated according to the number of spots in the pattern of the handkerchief. The liquid is allowed to flow through a pipe into the upper part of the press (which is fixed): it then flows through the perforations in the plate B, through the fourteen thicknesses of handkerchiefs, removing from them the Turkey red or other dye in its passage, and after passing through the perforations in E, finally leaves the press by pipes arranged for that purpose. The liquor is allowed to remain a few minutes to act on the cloth; after which it is drawn off, and clean water is allowed to pass through in a similar manner, to wash away the chlorine, otherwise on relaxing the pressure, the outline of the figure discharged would become ragged.

So admirable are the arrangements, that four men are sufficient to manage the whole sixteen presses, and keep them all working at once. They first go from press to press, admitting the water from the eight-inch cylinder, by which the lower plate is raised:—the layer of handkerchiefs in each press is arranged in its proper place:—the powerful pressure is then put in operation to them all:—the chlorine liquor is admitted:—the cleansing water is admitted:—the presses are again opened:—the layer of handkerchiefs is drawn between the rollers, and another layer brought between the plates; and so on, taking all the presses in succession. No time is lost by this method, since the chlorine requires to act for a few minutes on the handkerchiefs in each press. When fourteen pieces are entirely finished, they are carried away to the washing and bleaching departments, where the lustre of both the white and the colours is considerably heightened. By the excellent arrangement of the sixteen presses, 1600 pieces, consisting of 12 yards each, equal to 19,200 yards, are converted into Bandanas in the space of ten hours, by the assistance of four workmen.

The reader will then understand that it is by such a mode as this that are produced those red or blue handkerchiefs with white spots, in which the threads of the material are so thoroughly acted on, that both sides of cloth present almost precisely analogous appearances. The cloth is first dyed all over; and the colour is then driven out from those parts which are to form the spots of the pattern.

EACH power that sovereign Nature bids enjoy,
Man may corrupt, but man can ne'er destroy.
Like mighty rivers, with resistless force
The passions rage, obstructed in their course;
Swell to new heights, forbidden paths explore,
And drown those virtues which they fed before.

Brown.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE MONTHS.

III. MARCH.

Sturdy March, with brows full sternly bent,
And armed strongly, rode upon a ram;
The same which over Hellespontus swam;
Yet in his hand a spade he also hent,
And in a bag all sorts of seeds ysame,
Which on the earth he strewed as he went.—SPENSER

THIS month was the first of the year among the ancients; and not without reason, for they had the sanction of a divine command in this respect. The period of the Vernal equinox was prescribed to the Israelites for the commencement of their sacred year, and all the great festivals ordained by their law were regulated by it. Their civil year began in September, and is still considered to begin at that time by the Jewish people. The English year began at one time in March; but, by an Act of Parliament, passed in 1752, it was determined that the year should henceforth commence on the 1st of January. The Spring or the Autumnal equinox appears the fit time for commencing the year, but it is difficult to assign any reason for the choice of January as the opening month.

The Romans named this, the third month of our year, in honour of Mars, the god of war; perhaps from the fierce and blustering winds generally prevalent at its commencement. These winds are often piercingly cold, coming in from the east for many days together; and frequent and loud are the complaints made against the severity of the weather during this month. But trying as the season may be to aged persons and invalids, it is essentially necessary in such a climate as ours, that after the snow, and rain, and thaws of February, the superabundant moisture of the earth should be dried up, and the soil prepared for ploughing, and sowing, and receiving, with due effect, the warm sunshine and Spring showers. So much, indeed, does the value of the future harvest depend on dry weather at this season of the year, that the proverb is not inappropriate which declares, "a bushel of March dust is worth a king's ransom." And as to the terrors of an east wind, which many persons in perfect health are fearful of exposing themselves to, we may borrow the remark, that "the oftener we meet it firmly, the less it will shake us, and the more smiles we shall have from the fair months that follow."

The Winter birds of passage now begin to leave our shores. These birds quit the North of Europe, when that region becomes "ice-bound, firm as a rock," and take refuge in our more temperate climate. The field-fare, red-wing, and woodcock are of this kind, the reason of whose arrival here is evident, but as to their departure, it is not so easily accounted for why they should prefer retiring to spend their Summer in Norway or Sweden to remaining with us. If they can find food here in the Winter, they certainly would not want for a full supply in Summer; and if they were impatient of warmth, they would not quit us at a time when it is much cooler here than they would find a Lapland Summer to be. If we are thus deprived of our Winter visitants, we are soon to be amply compensated by the arrival of others from the South, who shall "cheer the woods and valleys with their ceaseless songs," and gladden our hearts with the well-known melody of Spring. The industrious but thievish tribes of rooks now begin to repair their old nests, or to construct new ones. The rookery is a scene of bustle and contention; loud and angry cawings are heard on all sides, and it affords no small

amusement to watch for a time their numerous tricks and artifices. The exercise of the plough, which now begins to be extended on all sides, affords an ample supply of food for these birds; and so bold and fearless are they in pursuit of the worms and other insects turned up by it, that they follow close in the train of the ploughman, sometimes darkening the field by their numbers. The voice of the ring-dove is now occasionally heard. Young lambs come forth in mild weather, and make a feeble, tottering attempt at playfulness. Many of them are often weak and sickly, and in need of such care as is thus recommended by Dyer in his poem of *The Fleece* :—

Be nimble, and the weakest, in thine arms,
Gently convey to the warm cote, and oft
Between the lark's note, and the nightingale's,
His hungry bleating still, with tepid milk;
In this soft office may thy children join,
And charitable habits learn in sport;
Nor yield him to himself, ere vernal airs
Sprinkle thy little croft with daisy flowers.

Reptiles now begin to wake from their long sleep, and bats are seen flitting about; bees sometimes venture from their hives, and thus assure us that the season of flowers is not far distant. This is the period when the young botanist should commence his studies. He should mark the little peeping plants as they first look out from some sheltered spot, and make himself acquainted with some of them ere the season pours in all its abundance, and bewilders him with its vast variety of forms. There is the primrose, the daisy, the celandine, and sometimes the violet, for his examination, and besides the catkins of the hazel, there are those of the alder, and the willow, which are extremely beautiful. In our sheltered gardens we now have crown-imperial, fritillaries, hyacinth, narcissus, scarlet ranunculus, great snow-drop, &c., mezerion, hepatica, and anemone.

Now Winter, lingering on the verge of Spring,
Retires reluctant, and from time to time
Looks back, while, at his keen and chilling breath,
Fair Flora sickens.

On the twentieth of this month the sun enters the constellation Aries, or the Ram, which is the first zodiacal sign; and this day is the first day of Spring. About this period, the ancient Romans celebrated their *Ludi Floreales*, or annual games in honour of Flora, accompanied by supplications for beneficent influences on the grass, trees, flowers, and other products of the earth, during the year. The Greeks had ceremonies of a similar nature, on the first coming of Spring. Between forty and fifty years ago, this season was celebrated at Eisenbach, in Saxony, with a curious allegorical representation. The inhabitants formed themselves into two parties: one party had the care of a grotesque figure, representing *Winter*, the other that of a youthful one, called *Spring*, or *Summer*. Winter appeared as an old man, covered with straw; and, after having been formally doomed to exile, he was carried by his party beyond the precincts of the town; while, on the other hand, the merry companions of Spring, having decked him with green boughs, and formed themselves into regular order of procession, advanced towards the town, singing national ballads, in praise of the season; here they were joined by those who had been executing the sentence pronounced upon Winter, and various festivities closed the day. These customs have since been greatly altered; and nothing remains of the festival of Eisenbach, but a sort of conciliatory offering to Spring, consisting of nosegays and sprigs of evergreen, with birds and eggs, emblematical of the season. A practice something like that of the people of the people of Eisenbach was common in this country, in ancient times.

Figures representing Winter and Summer were made to fight, and Summer of course gained the victory. Summer was

Apparelle all in greene, and drest
In youthful fine array;
The other, Winter, cladde in mosse,
With heare all hoare and graye.

We might multiply instances of the ancient customs of different countries on the coming of Spring, but we prefer rather to return to the consideration of the vegetable world, and to the delightful tokens of renewed life and beauty, which, in ordinary seasons, fail not to greet us towards the end of this month. The buds of most trees and shrubs are swelling, and in some instances the leaves begin to expand, especially in the elder, lilac, honeysuckle, and rose. The various species of fir, pine, and larch, are now in full flower; the meadows wear a livelier green; the sheltered garden begins to give promise of autumnal treasures; apricot, cherry, peach, and nectarine trees put forth their delicate blossoms, some snowy white, others tinged with a beautiful pink colour. Anxiously does the lover of his garden eye this early promise, and much does he fear that the effects of frost or canker blight, or driving storms, may wither up and destroy the incipient fruit. He narrowly observes each morning what has been the effect of the night's frost on his favourite trees; carefully removing the covering he had placed to shelter them, and experiencing a pleasure little to be understood by those who have never personally engaged in gardening, when he finds the fruit uninjured.

The present is a busy season, both with the farmer and the gardener; for while the former is sowing oats and barley, beans and peas, the latter is engaged in grafting and pruning his trees, digging and manuring beds, and sowing a great variety of seeds, both in the flower and kitchen garden. Grafting is a very interesting operation, and is the means by which we keep up the succession of fine fruit. The scion of a valuable fruit tree, when inserted upon a wild stock, does not, as one might at first suppose, lose its own nature as it becomes incorporated with the stock that supports it. On the contrary, it retains and imparts that nature, so that while the strength of the stock flows to the graft, the fruit produced is that of the scion. The clay generally used in grafting prevents the drying winds of this month from withering up the young scion, and depriving it of the moisture necessary for its existence. So great is the change produced in fruit by art, and by cultivation in a good soil, that it is difficult to recognise, in the innumerable variety now obtained, the original wild product of our hedges and lanes. The small, dry, sour, and unpalatable crab apple, which it is not uncommon to find in copses and hedges, and the fruit of the wild pear tree, which may be found in similar situations, seem to bear little affinity to the juicy and well-flavoured apples and pears of our gardens.

Spring is the season for diligent cultivation. In the garden and in the field not an hour is to be lost. Every fine day should witness the cheerful industry of those who are concerned in preparing the soil and sowing the seed. Indolence and neglect of the duties belonging to this season of the year can never be repaired. Like an undisciplined child, whose conduct betrays from day to day the unpardonable neglect of those who have the care of him, the soil, in its barrenness of good fruit, or its redolence of weeds, is a constant reproach to those who have neglected its diligent cultivation. On the other hand, how cheering is the prospect which generally rewards the well-directed labours of the husbandman,—how

delightful the sight of the springing crops, in their fair order and beautiful succession; and though many a promising appearance may deceive us,—many a field of corn, healthy in the blade, may disappoint in the harvest,—many a tree, richly laden with blossoms, prove destitute of fruit,—yet, generally speaking, how sure is the reward of persevering industry, and how plainly do the flourishing products of the soil betoken the character and the skill of the cultivator. Many indeed are the pleasures of opening Spring:—

To study culture, and with artful toil,
To meliorate and tame the stubborn soil;
To give dissimilar, yet fruitful lands,
The grain, or herb, or plant, that each demands;
To cherish virtue in an humble state,
And share the joys your bounty may create;
To mark the matchless workings of the Power
That shuts within its seed the future flower,
Bids these in elegance of form excel,
In colour these, and those delight the smell,
Sends Nature forth, the daughter of the skies,
To dance on earth, and charm all human eyes;
To teach the canvass innocent deceit,
Or lay the landscape on the snowy sheet—
These, these are arts pursued without a crime,
That leave no stain upon the wing of Time.

COWPER.

ON OMENS. I.

It forms a curious subject for reflection when we hear the numerous OMENS or forebodings of uneducated persons: they gradually yield to sounder trains of thought; but past ages show us how powerful was the influence which they exerted.

An *omen* was considered to be a sign or token of future events drawn from the language of a person speaking, or from some other casual circumstance. Sometimes the event in question was deemed to be the forerunner of some definite calamity or good fortune; but generally the forewarning was taken in an indefinite sense, and merely related to something "lucky" or "unlucky."

We find such omens extremely numerous among the ancients. It has been supposed that there was much of an *ominous* character in the following exhortation of Pythagoras:—

Adore the sound of a whispering wind: stir not the fire with a sword: turn aside from an edged tool: pass not over a balance: setting out on a journey, turn not back, for the furies may return with you: breed nothing that has crooked talons: receive not a swallow into your house: look not in a mirror by the light of a candle: at a sacrifice pare not your nails: eat not the heart or brain: taste not that which hath fallen from the table: break not bread: sleep not at noon: when it thunders touch the earth: pluck not a crown: roast not that which has been boiled: sail not on the ground: plant not a palm: breed a cock, but do not sacrifice it, for it is sacred to the sun and moon: plant mallows in thy garden, but eat them not: abstain from beans.

It is probable that some of the above were merely a figurative mode of expressing useful admonitions. But there were numerous omens, properly so called, believed in by the Greeks. Omens were plentiful at the sacrifices. It was deemed unlucky if the beast about to be sacrificed escaped the stroke—leaped up after being struck—did not fall flat on the ground—kicked and stamped after its fall—did not bleed freely—appeared to expire with pain or difficulty: or if the beast went unwillingly to the altar: or if its heart was found to be small, wrinkled, or in a state of palpitation: or if the sticks that were to form the fire did not kindle and inflame quickly. On the other hand, it was deemed a lucky omen if the animal nodded his head or wagged his tail, while going to sacrifice.

The appearance of *birds* in the eastern quarter of the heavens was looked upon by the Greeks as a propitious omen, because the sun, the great fountain of light and heat, and the principal source of fertility, makes his first appearance in that quarter; on the contrary, birds from the west were considered unlucky, because the sun leaves the world in that quarter. Among the other *ornithological* omens, were these:—If a *hawk* was seen seizing and devouring her prey, it portended death;—swallows, wherever and under whatever circumstances they were seen, were unlucky birds: before the defeats of Pyrrhus and Antony they appeared on the tent of the former, and on the ship of the latter, and by dispiriting the minds of their forces, probably prepared the way for their subsequent disasters;—in every part of Greece, except Athens, *owls* were regarded as unlucky birds;—if a *raven* came approaching towards the *left* hand, it was a very bad omen, but if it came croaking on the right hand it was a good omen. These birds were thought to understand their own predictions, because when they made a harsh noise and rattled in their throats as if they were choked, the worst omens were portended. The chattering of *maggies* was also an evil omen;—and when a *cock* sat silent and melancholy, it foreboded defeat. On the other hand, *lucky* omens were discovered in the following cases. If a flock of birds of different kinds came flying about any man, it was an excellent omen;—if an *eagle* were brisk and lively, and flew from the right hand to the left, it was one of the best omens which the gods could give;—if the prey escaped from a hawk, deliverance from danger was portended;—as *owls* were sacred to Minerva at Athens, they were there looked upon as omens of victory and success;—the *swan*, being an omen of fair weather, was deemed a lucky bird by mariners;—if a *raven* came croaking on the right hand, it was a tolerably good omen. A swarm of *bees* lighting on an altar, was a dreadful omen, and was said to have once happened before the defeat of Pompey. *Toads* were lucky reptiles. A *hare* presaged flight and disaster; and a *heron* was deemed an auspicious omen, and a token of success to those who were employed in any secret design.

Archbishop Potter says, that a number of omens were drawn from the influence of events on the person. The palpitations of the heart, the eye, or any of the muscles, and the ringing of the ear, were ominous: the omen was lucky if the palpitations were on the right side of the body, or the ringing in the right ear. A number of rules were laid down for the purpose of ascertaining whether *sneezing* were fortunate, or the contrary. When Themistocles was offering sacrifices it happened that three beautiful captives were brought to him, and at the same time the fire burned clear and bright, and a sneeze happened on the right hand; hereupon Euphrantides the soothsayer, embraced him, and predicted a victory to him. Xenophon was appointed general in consequence of a sneeze happening on the right hand while he was making a speech. If a person sneezed between midnight and the following noon it was fortunate; but from noon to midnight unfortunate. If a man sneezed at table while they were taking away the dishes, or if another happened to sneeze on his left hand, it was unlucky; if on the right hand, fortunate. If in undertaking any business, two or four sneezes happened, it was a lucky omen, and gave encouragement to proceed: if more than four, the omen was neither good nor bad; if one or three, it was unlucky, and dissuaded them from proceeding in what they had designed. If two men were deliberating about any business, and both of them chanced to sneeze together, it was a prosperous omen.

It was deemed a bad omen to meet an ape, a snake lying in the road, or a hare crossing the path. If, on the meeting of a public assembly, a weazel were observed to cross the path, no business was done. To spill salt at table was greatly dreaded by the Romans, and this superstition has not now wholly vanished away. If a husbandman, while he was going to sow his land, saw a woman at work with her spindle, or carrying it uncovered, he anticipated a bad harvest. The Greeks were careful not to make use of any of the words which signify *death*, as that was deemed unlucky; but they expressed their meaning in a circuitous or figurative way. They clothed their dead in white garments, whence it was reckoned an unlucky omen for a sick person to have white apparel; and if a person dreamed of a fire being extinguished, during the sickness of any in the same family, it was deemed to portend death.

Afflicted persons suffered their hair to grow, the cutting of the hair being deemed a token of joy. Mariners used to shave themselves when delivered from shipwreck: hence, if they dreamed of having the whole head shaved, that was deemed to portend a lucky voyage; but it was not one of the least ridiculous of these omens that, for a man to dream he had shaved *his own* head, was an unlucky omen.

The Greeks were particular not to marry except at certain seasons. The month of January, and the time of full moon, were the favourite periods. If a pair of turtle doves appeared during the celebration of the marriage, it presaged domestic harmony. If a crow and its mate appeared, it denoted long life to the new married couple; but if the crow appeared alone, it portended misery: hence, women used to be on the watch, to drive away a crow, if he should be seen to approach singly.

Comets were always thought to portend something dreadful. Eclipses of the sun and moon have so terrified whole armies, that they durst not engage their enemies; for, the true cause of them being unknown, they were held to be the work of the gods, who thus gave them notice of some signal calamity. Lightning, thunder, and other electrical influences and effects, according to the quarter whence they came, were good or evil omens.

To show the silly and utterly futile ground on which the omens of the Greeks and Romans rested, we will detail three or four instances in which sharp-witted men moulded them to their interests, even when they were established as *unlucky*. It was usual among the Greeks to deck tombs with flowers, herbs, and ribands: *parsley* was especially employed for this purpose; and was hence regarded as an ominous plant. As Timoleon was proceeding to reconnoitre the position and strength of the Carthaginian army, he was met by a number of mules loaded with parsley. This his soldiers deemed an unlucky omen; but Timoleon, with much ingenuity and presence of mind, converted it, in the opinion of his troops, into an omen of victory, by recalling to their recollection, that at the Isthmian games, the Corinthians crowned the victors with chaplets of parsley, accounting it a sacred wreath. In order to impress this interpretation of the omen more strongly on them, he first made himself a chaplet, and then his captain, and all the soldiers followed his example.

Another instance was afforded by Epaminondas. A riband that hung in his spear was carried by the wind towards a Lacedemonian sepulchre, which was deemed by his soldiers a bad omen; but he, with great presence of mind, converted it into a presage of the defeat of the enemy, by assuring his soldiers that, as the riband had been carried to the sepulchre

of the Lacedemonians, it must portend death to *them*, and not to the Thebans.

The powerful mind of Cæsar generally kept him above these weaknesses. When he landed at Admetum, in Africa, with his army, he happened to fall on his face. This was regarded as a bad omen; but he found means to apply it to a very different purpose; for, taking hold of the ground with his right hand, and kissing it, as if he had fallen on purpose, he exclaimed, "I take possession of thee, O Africa!" Lucky and unlucky days stood on an equally unsound foundation. The day of the week on which the Romans suffered their memorable defeat from the Cimbrians, was long viewed as a most unfortunate day; and no general, if he could possibly avoid it, would begin a battle on that day. When Lucullus expressed his determination to attack Tigranes, King of Armenia, on the day in question, his officers unanimously and strongly opposed him; but he persisted in his design, gave battle, completely routed the enemy, obtained one of the most signal and important victories recorded in Roman history, and changed the character of the day from unfortunate to *fortunate*, as he foretold he would, when his officers endeavoured to dissuade him from fighting.

But so greatly had the superstitions of omens infected and debased the public mind among the ancient Greeks and Romans, that few public men were found hardy enough to carry on the national concerns of peace and war, in opposition to the general feeling, as decided by the exhibition of an omen. The omens derived from the feeding of chickens were much attended to in time of war; and contempt of their intimations was supposed to occasion signal misfortunes, as in the case of P. Claudius, in the First Punic War. When the person who had the charge of the chickens told him they would not eat, which was esteemed a bad omen, he ordered them to be tossed into the sea, saying, "Then let them drink." After this, engaging with the enemy, he was defeated with the loss of his fleet, and disgraced at his return to Rome.

The art of soothsaying, divining, or observing omens, by means of birds, arrived at such perfection, and gained such credit in the ancient world, that no honours were conferred, no magistracies created, and nothing of importance was undertaken, either in peace or war, without the approbation of birds; and if not confirmed by them, other divinations were often disregarded. Birds, because they continually flew about, were supposed to observe and know the most secret actions of men, and to be acquainted with all events. Hence the figurative expression of the royal preacher of Israel: "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter." Eccles. x. 20.

The observers of times, those who pretended to foretell future events by present occurrences, are condemned by Moses in the Book of the Law, and the Israelites were forbidden to seek after them, because such were the aiders and abettors of idolatry, and would draw off the people of God from following after HIM, to whom alone belong "the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." Acts i. 7.

In our next paper, we shall trace the existence of OMENS in more modern times.

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